Message

From: Lynn, Tricia [lynn.tricia@epa.gov]
Sent: 12/27/2017 6:48:11 PM
To: AO OPA OMR CLIPS [AO_OPA_OMR_CLIPS@epa.gov]
Subject: Media Clips, 12/27/17

AP
8 states sue environmental agency over upwind air pollution
https://apnews.com/87f0a52c6cc14c2aa530b94e3d4779cc/8-states-sue-environmental-agency-over-upwind-air-pollution
By AP, 12/26/17

ALBANY, N.Y. (AP) — The attorneys general in eight Eastern Seaboard states are suing the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency over air pollution that blows in from upwind states.

New York Democrat Eric Schneiderman (SHNEYE'-dur-muhn) is the leading attorney general in the lawsuit. He says it was filed Tuesday in a federal appeals court in the District of Columbia to force President Donald Trump's administration to take action to ensure upwind states control pollution.

Connecticut, Delaware, Maryland, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island and Vermont also are part of the lawsuit.

The lawsuit stems from the EPA's denial of a petition some of those states filed in 2013 under the Clean Air Act to get the agency to add nine upwind states to a group that must work together to reduce smog pollution.

An EPA spokeswoman says the agency doesn't comment on pending litigation.

The Daily Iberian (via AP)
http://www.iberianet.com/national/news/denka-s-lawyers-argue-that-st-john-residents-offer-no/article_8aa89cd6-8cb1-5b22-be17-2463552bfcdc.html
Denka's lawyers argue that St. John residents offer no proof that chloroprene caused harm
By Della Hasselle, 12/26/17 (updated 12/27/17 @ 2 AM)

Lawyers for a chemical company accused of releasing what environmentalists say are "dangerous" amounts of a chemical called chloroprene into the air in St. John the Baptist Parish say that a lawsuit against the company should be dismissed because local residents have failed to show the chemical is harmful.

Attorneys for Denka Performance Elastomer made the argument in a legal filing Friday, the first time that the company has responded to the suit brought over the summer by 13 St. John residents who live near the chemical plant.

The residents sued both Denka and E.I. du Pont de Nemours and Co., the previous owner of the LaPlace facility, in an effort to reduce or stop production of what the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency considers a "likely carcinogen."

The lawsuit, which includes St. John the Baptist Parish Councilman Larry Sorapuru as a plaintiff, seeks class-action status. It asks that U.S. District Judge Martin Feldman order the plant to stop or reduce production until emissions reach levels deemed safe by the EPA.

The residents are not asking for compensation for physical injury, in part because the evidence linking various concentrations of chloroprene emissions and physical harm to humans is "undeveloped," their lawyers say.

However, they do seek damages for various other issues, including lost property value and "emotional distress" resulting from "release of excessive concentrations" of the chemical.

Lawyers for the plant, on the other hand, want the judge to throw out the entire suit because they say the residents have failed to show that the chemical has caused any of them "irreparable injury," or that any alleged injury to them outweighs the damage an injunction would cause the chemical plant.

Forcing the plant to dramatically reduce or halt production would be so costly that it "could ultimately result in the shuttering of the ... facility," the filing says.

Justin Marocco, a lawyer for Denka, said the plaintiffs can't prove any "ruin, vice or defect" in the plant and haven't shown how the chemical company has been negligent.

The company also says the plaintiffs filed their lawsuit too late for the court to entertain it, as the vast majority of Louisiana personal injury claims have a one-year statute of limitations.

Denka took over the plant in November 2015.

It had been operating for nearly half a century before then, with little scrutiny. It wasn't until 2010 that the EPA reclassified chloroprene as a "likely carcinogen," saying that exposure to quantities above 0.2 micrograms per cubic meter of air puts people at increased risk.

Then, in December 2016, the EPA released its National Air Toxic Assessment, which found that, because of the Denka plant's emissions, residents of St. John the Baptist Parish have the highest potential risk of cancer from airborne pollutants of any community in the country.

Since then, EPA data have shown that chloroprene levels in St. John have at times reached up to 765 times the agency's risk threshold.

Denka pledged to reduce airborne emissions of chloroprene by 85 percent by the end of this year. The company is wrapping up a $25 million retrofitting project designed to achieve that.

In the meantime, residents, state regulators, scientists, company officials and lawyers have all engaged in intense debate over the health ramifications of chloroprene exposure.

Dr. Jimmy Guidry, the state health officer, has said that measuring the risk has been difficult, largely because "there's not a whole lot of science about chloroprene."

Variables include the proximity of the exposed person to the site, the amount of time chloroprene stays in the body and the tendency for chloroprene levels in the air to spike and dip over time.

The lawsuit was initially filed in July in Louisiana's 40th Judicial District Court, but it was moved to federal court in New Orleans in August. It's unclear when the judge will rule on Denka's motion.

The affected area laid out in the petition is bounded by Interstate 10 on the north, the St. James Parish line on the west, La. 3127 on the south and the community of Killona and the Bonnet Carre Spillway on the east.

That's the area where St. John residents and their lawyers see "a pattern of excessive measurements of chloroprene in the air," lawyer Eberhard Garrison said in July.

Reuters

HTTPS://WWW.REUTERS.COM/ARTICLE/US-USA-ENVIRONMENT-NEW-YORK/NORTHEAST-STATES-SUE-EPA-OVER-AIR-POLLUTION-FROM-MIDWEST-IDUSKBN1EK1BK

Northeast states sue EPA over air pollution from Midwest

By Peter Szekely. 12/26/17

NEW YORK (Reuters) - Eight northeastern states said on Tuesday they sued the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to force it to impose more stringent controls on a group of mostly Midwestern states whose air pollution they claim is being blown in their direction.

In the latest development of a legal saga that began during Barack Obama's presidency, the lawsuit by New York and seven other states challenges a Trump administration decision to allow nine upwind states to escape tighter smog pollution controls.

"Millions of New Yorkers are breathing unhealthy air as smog pollution continues to pour in from other states," said New York Attorney General Eric Schneiderman, who led the coalition of states that filed the lawsuit dated Friday.

The coalition urged the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia to overturn the EPA's decision not to add the nine upwind states to the congressionally created "Ozone Transport Region," which requires stricter pollution controls.

An EPA spokeswoman declined to comment.

Northeast and mid-Atlantic states have long contended that emissions from coal-fired power plants and other air pollution in the Midwest is carried eastward by prevailing air currents.

In a statement, Scheiderman said the EPA was empowered to add states to the "Ozone Transport Region" if the EPA has reason to believe that their air pollution significantly causes states already in the region to exceed federal pollution standards.

The lawsuit was filed by the attorneys general of Connecticut, Delaware, Maryland, Massachusetts, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island and Vermont, which in late 2013 originally asked to have nine upwind states added to the "Ozone Transport Region."

That case resulted in a consent decree that forced the EPA to decide by the end of October 2017 whether to add Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Michigan, North Carolina, Ohio, Tennessee, Virginia and West Virginia to the region.

EPA chief Scott Pruitt declined to add the states.

Scheiderman said the EPA's own studies show that pollution from upwind states substantially adds to harmful levels of smog in New York, and cited an American Lung Association report showing that the New York City area ranks as the nation's ninth most smog-polluted city.

Bloomberg Environment

http://esweb.bna.com/eslw/display/no_alpha.adp?mode=si&frag_id=125696291&item=408&prod=deln&cat=AGENCY

EPA Responds to State Ozone Suggestions as Court Deadline Looms

By Jennifer Lu, 12/27/17

The EPA stuffed states' stockings just before Christmas with overdue letters informing local air pollution officials whether the agency agrees on regions state officials believe have ozone pollution problems.

The Environmental Protection Agency missed its Oct. 1 deadline to decide which parts of the country exceed the national ambient air quality standards for ozone that were updated in 2015 and now faces a Jan. 12 court deadline to announce plans to complete that process.

In its latest step, the EPA late Dec. 22 sent letters to all 50 states, known as 120-day letters, informing them about whether the agency agrees with state recommendations on which areas violate the 70 parts per billion ozone standards.

Though the EPA has determined 85 percent of the counties in the U.S. currently meet the ozone air pollution standards, states are still waiting for further EPA action on areas that exceed those requirements.

The letters go out 120 days before the EPA decides to accept or alter state recommendations for regions that exceed the pollution standards.

States must then draft plans to reduce pollution in the areas deemed to violate the standards, which could lead to new emissions-reduction requirements for industries and transportation.

Sued for Missed Deadline

Environmental and public health groups sued the EPA for missing its deadline to complete the nonattaiment designation process, and the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit gave the agency a Jan. 12 deadline.

"They're taking action, which is a positive," Seth Johnson, an Earthjustice lawyer representing environmental groups on the lawsuit against the EPA, told Bloomberg Environment.

Johnson said he would be looking at what modifications the EPA made to states' air quality assessments.

"There are ways to draw boundaries that are more- or less-protective," he said. If you draw very small non-attainment areas, you're going to be controlling fewer sources.

Bloomberg Environment

http://esweb.bna.com/eslw/display/no_alpha.adp?mode=si&frag_id=125696292&item=408&prod=deln&cat=AGENCY

EPA Chemical Fee Proposal at White House for Review

By Steven Gibb, 12/27/17

An EPA proposal that would set industry fees to assist with the review and oversight of chemicals is at the White House for regulatory and interagency review.

The proposed rule (RIN:2070-AK27), sent to the White House Office of Management and Budget Dec. 22, would help defray the Environmental Protection Agency's costs of administering chemical evaluation powers that Congress granted the EPA when it amended the nation's chemicals law in 2016.

According to the plan, the fees apply to "all manufacturers, importers, and processors who submit certain notices and applications to EPA" under Sections 4, 5, and 6 of the chemicals law. The fees "defray a portion of the cost of administering . . . collecting, processing, [and] reviewing," information on chemicals.

Section 4 allows EPA to require industry testing of compounds, and section 5 governs new chemical submissions before they can go to market. Section 6 grants EPA the authority to review chemical risks.

Agency officials and chemical industry representatives did not immediately respond to a Bloomberg Environment request for comment Dec. 26.

The EPA expects to issue the final industry fee rule in September of 2018.

Bloomberg Environment

http://esweb.bna.com/eslw/display/no_alpha.adp?mode=si&frag_id=125696296&item=408&prod=deln&cat=AGENCY

No Slacking in 2018 as EPA, Companies Confront Chemicals Law

By Pat Rizzuto, 12/27/17

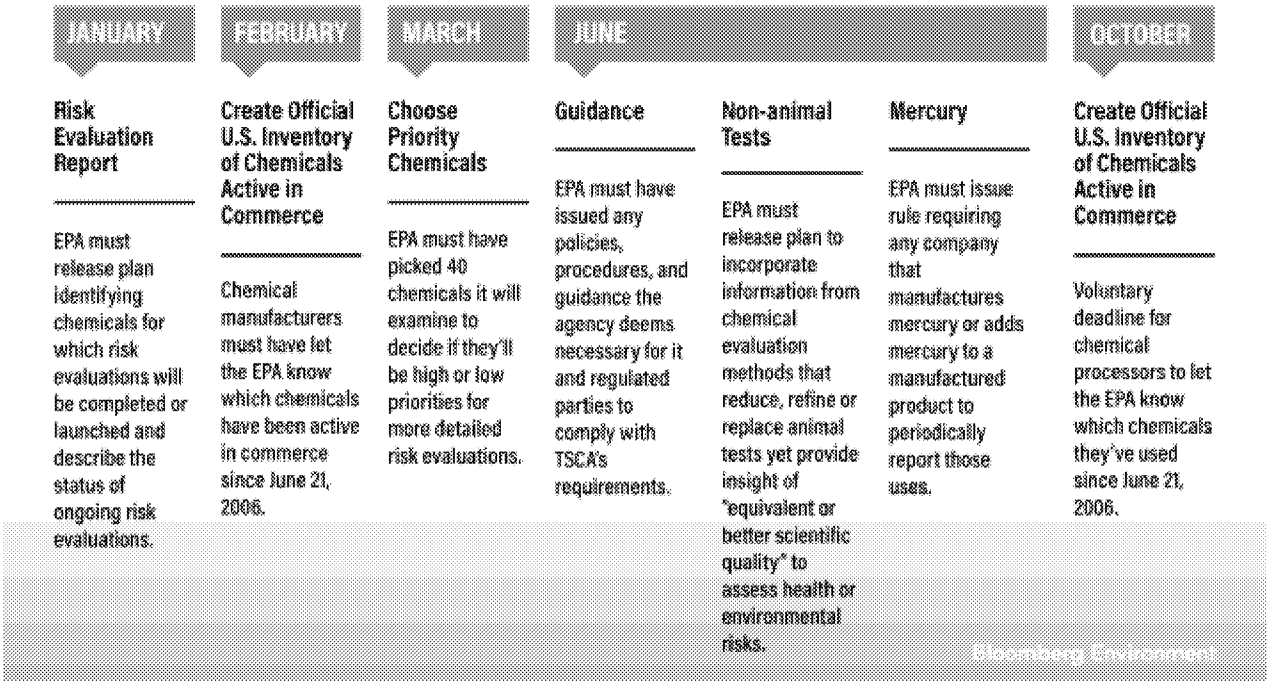
Manufacturers, states, and others tracking chemical policies will need to be alert in 2018 as the EPA stakes out new terrain in implementing the nation's primary chemicals law two years after Congress overhauled it.

Chemical manufacturers and processors face deadlines of particular interest. The Environmental Protection Agency is creating a master list of chemicals that have been made or used in the U.S. since 2006.

If the companies haven't notified the agency by specific dates about a chemical they manufacture or process, that chemical won't be legal to make or use without some additional work. Not all of the EPA's other obligations have deadlines, but they're needed to implement the law.

The agency is working toward the following deadlines throughout 2018 as it continues to implement the amended Toxic Substances Control Act.

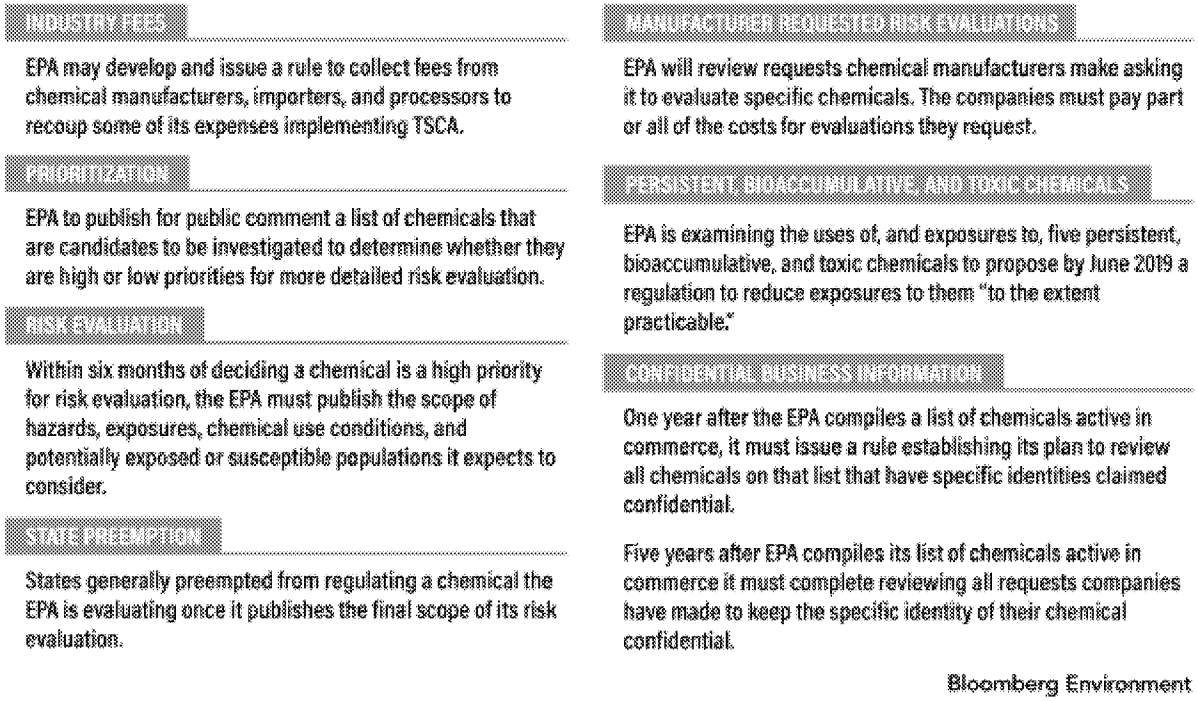
TSCA Milestones 2018



(Click here for a larger copy of this timeline.)

In addition to meeting the above deadlines, the following are the agency's major implementation goals for 2018.

More TSCA Implementation Work



(Click here for a larger copy of these goals.)

Bloomberg Environment
http://esweb.bna.com/eslw/display/no_alpha.adp?mode=si&frag_id=125696303&item=408&prod=deln&cat=AGENCY
Chevron Closed Mine, Now New Mexico Town Faces Daunting Recovery
By Brenna Goth, 12/27/17

Chevron Mining Inc. shook the village of Questa, N.M., when it closed the molybdenum mine that anchored the rural community in the Sangre de Cristo Mountains.

Local leaders are still hunting for a new identity and economic driver for its roughly 1,770 residents more than three years after Chevron laid off hundreds of workers. The company expects to remediate for decades the remaining Superfund site that a century of mining in the area left behind.

The turning point for Questa may come in 2018, as millions of dollars in Chevron settlement money and government grants aim to attract new industries and improve degraded natural resources. Some close to the community are hopeful for a new start, although others question whether it's enough to help a village that for decades relied on one employer.

Upcoming initiatives in Questa address concerns seen in towns throughout the southwest after the mines they depend on shut down. Many of them are remote, clouded by environmental risks, and offer residents few other job prospects.

Those factors are the focus of a new restoration plan to improve Questa's water quality and the nearby Red River, which was once a premier fishing destination. The projects fit the vision of attracting new companies and marketing the village as a recreational destination, said Malaquias Rael, former mayor and chairman of the board of the Questa Economic Development Fund, which was started by Chevron.
"The worst thing that happens in a mining town is the stigma that remains when the mine is closed," Rael told Bloomberg Environment.

Estimated $1 Billion Cleanup Moves Forward

Nearly a century of open-pit and underground molybdenum mining near Questa contaminated soil, groundwater, and the Red River, according to criteria the EPA used to put the site on its National Priority List in 2011. Heavy metals and other hazardous substances found there are a risk to people, a fish hatchery downstream, and the environment, it said.

Molycorp Inc. started mining molybdenum, a metal often used as an alloy to strengthen steel, in the early 1900s. It later became the last operating mine owned by multinational energy company Chevron.

Chevron closed the mine when molybdenum prices dropped and is on the hook for much of the remediation, some of which is already completed. The federal government is also partly liable for the estimated $1 billion in cleanup costs, because it provided land and financing for the mine, according to a July decision by the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Tenth Circuit.

Work is moving forward under a roughly $143 million settlement with Chevron formally approved in May. It was the largest agreement of its kind in the Environmental Protection Agency's south central region, an agency spokesperson told Bloomberg Environment in an email.

The company is responsible for a pilot project to cover and revegetate an area where mine waste is stored, among other initiatives. A water treatment plant intended to prevent further contamination of the Red River is operational and in the final stages of commissioning, Chevron Spokesman Tommy Lyles told Bloomberg Environment.

The plant captures surface water and water pumped out of the mine to treat it before it enters the river, he said. Chevron must treat the contaminated groundwater in perpetuity.

New Well, Sewer System to Quell Water Concerns

Restoration projects proposed by community agencies will also soon receive funding from a $4 million settlement between Chevron and the site's Natural Resource Damage Assessment trustees.

A draft plan recommends funding several proposals, including improvements to the Red River for the benefit of wildlife like trout. Also slated for approval is a project to hook up nearby houses that rely on private septic systems to village sewer lines and build a new municipal well.

Trustees aim to release the final plan in February in hopes of launching the projects next summer, Trais Kliphuis, executive director of the New Mexico Office of Natural Resources Trustee, told Bloomberg Environment. The results could help the village overcome concerns about its water, she said.

Businesses need an adequate and clean water supply to locate there, she said. Residents are also concerned about groundwater contamination from mine tailing seepage and septic leaks, according to the draft plan.

"This helps with that in a big way," Kliphuis said.

Residents 'Starting to Get Desperate'

Questa has so far failed to attract major economic development since the mine closed, Mayor Mark Gallegos told Bloomberg Environment. Many former miners have left the community, spent down their savings, or taken temporary remediation work, he said.

"We're hitting the bottom of the whole Chevron shutdown," said Gallegos, who became mayor a few months before the company's announcement. "People are starting to get desperate."

Village leaders have to balance economic development with holding government agencies and Chevron accountable for the environmental remediation that will affect residents for the rest of their lives, Gallegos said. Questa is expecting more of them, he said.

The village has seen some movement toward a new vision, though, led in part by the Questa Economic Development Fund. Chevron started the nonprofit years before the mine closed to help diversify the village's economy and contributes to it annually, Christian Isely, Chevron economic development adviser, told Bloomberg Environment.

The company also donated about 30 acres of land to build a new business park that now includes the Taos Mountain Energy Bar factory. A $1.2 million U.S. Economic Development Administration grant announced in September could bolster efforts to attract new companies.

And conservation groups like Trout Unlimited are working to establish Questa as a hub for fishing trips and other recreation, Toner Mitchell, New Mexico water and habitat coordinator for the organization, told Bloomberg Environment. The focus is restoring the channelized Red River to a more natural course that helps fish thrive, he said.

'Community of Survivors'

New support from the Department of Labor could also help former miners in the coming year, Isely said. The workers recently became eligible for its Trade Adjustment Assistance program after their applications were previously denied.

The program helps workers, who lost jobs because of increased imports, with training and other re-employment services. It's unclear, though, how many people will use the assistance considering the mine closed years ago, Gallegos said.

And for people who do go to school or gain job skills in the community, local leaders want to keep them there to power a new workforce. It's a challenge to reinforce the mindset that Questa can no longer be a mining town, Rael from the economic development fund said.

"We are a community of survivors anyway," Rael said. "How to turn survivors into thrivers is another thing."

Bloomberg Environment
http://esweb.bna.com/eslw/display/no_alpha.adp?mode=si&frag_id=125696297&item=408&prod=deln&cat=AGENCY
What Environmental Attorneys Are Watching Out for in 2018
By David Schultz, 12/27/17

So that was quite a year.

The federal government in 2017 made dramatic reversals in nearly every area of environmental policy—from water to air to chemicals to public lands and, especially, climate.

What's next? Bloomberg Environment asked a handful of environmental attorneys with a wide range of specialties what they expect the new year will bring. This highly unscientific survey yielded some interesting and unexpected answers:

Waters Jurisdiction

"No legal issue goes more to the heart of our mission than this one. We know from history what will happen if we define federal jurisdiction narrowly." —Daniel Estrin, general counsel, Waterkeeper Alliance

Estrin is referring to the protracted legal drama surrounding the federal government's attempt to define which bodies of water fall under the jurisdiction of the Clean Water Act. This definition matters a lot because waters that do fall under this law's jurisdiction come with a potpourri of requirements for industry, including federal permits, oil spill prevention requirements, state water quality certifications, and more.

Redefining water jurisdiction is an issue that has bedeviled at least the past three presidential administrations and one that the Supreme Court may provide a little clarity on in 2018.

Endangered Pollinators

"It's hard to think of a more important [endangered species] issue than the upcoming consideration of potential listing decisions for several pollinator species with extensive ranges...Every industry would be affected." —Parker Moore, attorney focused on environment and property rights issues, Beveridge & Diamond

A steady decline over the years in the numbers of pollinating insects like bees and butterflies has gotten so bad that a few species may land on the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's endangered list. That would have huge ramifications, Moore said, because the habitat range for these insects covers the entire continental U.S. The listing of bee or butterfly species could acutely affect farmers because it may force them to stop using certain insecticides on their crops.

Lead Pipes

"Partial replacements have been shown to increase the amount of lead that can get into the water and are possibly doing more harm than not touching the lines in the first place." —Mae Wu, health attorney, Natural Resources Defense Council

Largely in response to the Flint, Mich., contamination crisis, the EPA has been working for years on updating its regulations on lead in drinking water, with a draft of the new rules potentially coming out in 2018.

Attorneys like Wu will be watching to see what requirements these new regulations impose on water utilities—specifically, whether they force utilities to get rid of all of their lead pipes. Many of these pipes are on private property and Wu said she's worried the regulations won't address these privately-owned pipes, leading to lots of partial replacements that make the lead problem worse.

Groundwater Contamination

"A new wave of groundwater/drinking water contamination lawsuits...involving emerging contaminants of concern."—John McGahren, attorney specializing in toxic waste cleanup issues, Morgan, Lewis & Bockius

Those emerging contaminants McGahren is talking about are the remnants of potentially toxic industrial chemicals that have seeped into aquifers over the years and caused huge problems for many cities and towns across the country. Chemicals like PFOA, PFOS, 1,4-dioxane, and others are hard to detect, even harder to clean up, and can cause health effects that scientists are just beginning to understand.

McGahren said he expects a lot more litigation from people who have been exposed to these chemicals. Who is liable for this exposure? That's an issue that likely won't be solved in 2018, or any time soon.

Mandated Disclosure

"An important emerging issue is state (and retailer) mandated ingredient disclosure and the potential preemption of those requirements." —Warren Lehrenbaum, attorney, Crowell & Moring

Despite the long-awaited 2016 passage of an update to the law that lays out exactly how federal agencies regulate chemicals, regulatory certainty has been elusive for the chemicals industry.

Beyond the sweeping changes at the federal level, chemical makers also are finding that some states have passed their own laws regarding the disclosure of ingredients in household items like cleaners and cosmetics. And even some retailers are getting into the game, launching programs to weed from their shelves those chemicals believed to be hazardous. Will Congress pass a law blocking states and retailers from doing this? Lehrenbaum will be watching.

More Suits?

"I haven't seen as much as I expected—still more may be coming." —John Sheehan, partner, Michael Best & Friedrich

This time last year, many were predicting a tsunami of lawsuits from environmental groups challenging the new Trump administration's decisions. But Sheehan, who previously served in both the Justice Department and the EPA's Office of General Counsel, said this tsunami never really materialized.

There were suits, of course, but not the legal barrage that some had expected. That could change in 2018 as more of the administration's policy actions become official and, as a result, ripe for a legal challenge.

This story is part of a Bloomberg Environment series on issues to look for in 2018. We're publishing these Outlook articles on a wide range of topics throughout December.

Politico
https://www.politicopro.com/energy/article/2017/12/is-trump-delivering-energy-dominance-250250

Is Trump delivering 'energy dominance'?
By Ben Lefebver, 12/27/17, 9:11 AM

President Donald Trump's pledge to establish U.S. "energy dominance" has been a key pillar of his America First platform, but after a year in office, his efforts seem destined to have only a modest impact on oil and gas production while setting back some of the fastest growing energy technologies.

Trump's call for energy dominance dates back to his May 2016 campaign rally in North Dakota, and pushing for energy production growth was the subject of one of his first executive orders. That directive was designed to unshackle the industry from what Republicans had decried as the burdens placed by the Obama administration on fossil fuel companies.
Story Continued Below

"They put American energy under lock and key," Trump said of the Obama administration in a speech unveiling the National Security Strategy earlier this month. "We have unlocked America's vast energy resources."

The good news for Trump is that the country is ending 2017 with record high oil and gas production. But the bad news is that the surge in energy output that started a decade ago may be nearing a plateau, and some experts worry that Trump's policies will hinder the shift to newer technologies that are likely to play a central role in the global economy in the coming years.

That includes renewable energy and electric vehicles, which could suffer setbacks if Trump erects trade barriers to solar imports and rolls back the aggressive vehicle fuel economy rules put in place under the Obama administration that experts say are crucial to driving investments in electric vehicles.

"The highest growing energy sources in the world are emerging technologies — electric vehicles and renewables — and this administration has proposed slashing the budget for clean energy," said Jason Bordoff, founding director of Columbia University's Center on Global Energy Policy. "We need to continue to invest in tomorrow's technologies, not only the ones we're using today."

U.S. oil production has nearly doubled during the past 10 years to an estimated 9.2 million barrels per day in 2017, and natural gas output has climbed by about 5 percent over that period to 73.5 billion cubic feet per day this year, a result of the massive investments by companies to deploy hydraulic fracturing and horizontal drilling technologies to unlock the resources trapped in shale rock. And now, industry consultants Wood MacKenzie are forecasting production will flatten out at 11.5 million barrels a day by 2026.

While adding another 2 million barrels a day to U.S. production is significant, it's a far cry from what Trump claimed at a rally in Pensacola, Fla., this month, when he said, "We are pursuing American energy dominance. And by the end of this year we will be totally self-sufficient." Even with the rising oil production, the U.S. imports nearly 8 million barrels of crude per day.

Trump's big bet is that cutting regulations and opening up areas that have long been closed off for drilling will boost oil and gas production even further. But the federal government's influence mainly extends to federal lands, so there may be little effect on the industry that is mostly clustered on private property in west Texas, North Dakota, Pennsylvania and elsewhere, analysts said.

"Shale resources are on private and state-owned lands, so that's where economic resources are," said Nick Loris, The Heritage Foundation's Fellow in Energy and Environmental Policy Nick Loris. "Because we were fortunate that the shale plays were on state and privately owned lands, we are already energy dominant."

Interior Department records show that companies have pulled back on the amount of federal land they've sought for drilling since 2006, when oil prices reached a peak near $145 a barrel. After the latest drop in prices in 2014, the number

of oil and gas leases issued by the Bureau of Land Management fell to just 520 in 2016, the latest year for which information is available, far below the 3,746 it approved in 2006.

The number of wells drilled on federal land peaked at 5,343 in fiscal year 2007 before steadily dwindling to 847 last year, a decline that's in line with the drop in the U.S. oil price benchmark. But it also represents a relative pittance in overall U.S. drilling activity: Exxon Mobil and other companies started 38,186 wells throughout the country in 2008, a number that only experienced a prolonged significant drop when it fell to 19,014 in 2015 , according to data from S&P Platts Global. The number was 16,806 near the end of December 2017.

The Trump administration's effort to draw companies back onto federal land has so far been a bust. In December, Interior offered every acre it had available in Alaska to drilling companies. Only two companies bid — ConocoPhillips and Anadarko Petroleum — yielding a modest $1.2 million for the federal coffers according to auction results data.

And with oil prices now at little more than a third of their June 2008 peak, expensive drilling operations in the federal waters in the Gulf of Mexico also lost their luster just as the shale gas boom starting to gain traction onshore. In March 2013, companies bid $1.2 billion for 1.7 million acres just in the central Gulf region, far more demand than the August sale for the entirety of the Gulf of Mexico that drew just $121 million for 508,096 acres.

Still, energy industry lobbyists contend that opening more federal acres to drilling is keeping in the spirit of a free market. Oil and gas companies may not need the acres today, but would prefer to have them on hand in case oil demand picks up, said Chris Guith, senior vice president for policy at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce's Global Energy Institute.

"Some areas might not garner initial interest," Guith said. "But I'd prefer that possibility to there being great interest but regulators preventing access."

Trump has also said his approvals of the Keystone XL and Dakota Access pipeline have helped U.S. move toward energy dominance. While Dakota Access has been delivering oil from North Dakota to the Midwest, Keystone XL has still not started construction, and its developer, TransCanada, is still deciding whether to proceed after regulators in Nebraska approved added new restrictions on its route through the state.

Meanwhile, the administration is pushing exports of liquefied natural gas, even sending EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt on an unusual trip to Morocco this month to pitch the fuel. That business could be promising, but so far, of the 11 LNG export projects approved under the Obama administration, only one, Cheniere's Sabine Pass plant, has finished construction and started shipping.

The Trump administration's moves clearing the way for LNG shippers to deal directly with China, may offer an opportunity for LNG shipments grow and create more demand for U.S. gas, but so far they have come up short. Even an announcement of potential deal between China's Sinopec to buy into an Alaskan LNG project has drawn some skepticism, since several U.S. companies have previously walked away from the project, whose cost is believed to be far higher than the $43 billion estimated by Sinopec and the Alaska Gasline Development Corp.

European buyers have also been reluctant to commit to long-term contracts with U.S. LNG producers, and instead seem content to buy on the open market that is well supplied.

And part of the difficulties in winning new business could be partly to blame on Trump's talk of dominating global energy markets, which has raised hackles in Europe, said Frank Verrastro, senior vice president at the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

"We always derided other countries such as Russia that used energy as a geopolitical lever," Verrastro said. "Dominance suggests there is a subordinate role, and some people chafe at that."

Trump has pointed to a bounce in coal production as a victory for his policies, since output, which languished for years as coal-fired power plants shut down, grew eight percent during the first 11 months of this year to reach 719 million tons on the back of rising exports. But the Energy Information Administration expects that domestic coal production will fall next year "because of lower exports and no growth in coal consumption."

So far, the one new coal mine to open this year, the Acosta Mine near Pittsburgh, will employ 70 people full-time to mine a type of coal used in making steel, not the more prevalent thermal coal.

While the administration is giving the next wave of renewable energy short shrift, solar, wind and other next-generation power sources are forecast to generate 10 percent of the country's electricity this year, according to the EIA. Instead of looking to renewable to decrease the country's still-sizable dependency on oil imports, Trump has often dismissed the sector's potential and proposed slashing federal research into lowering the cost of solar power projects, and has come under fire for illegally withholding grant money awarded to advance energy research projects.

Trump, a long time foe of wind power, also dismissed the technology at his recent rally in Florida. "The windmills are wonderful, but when the wind does not blow, it causes problems. 'We have no energy this week,'" Trump said.

The biggest setback for renewables could come next month, when the administration is expected to erect tariffs on imports of solar panels, a move supported by Suniva, a company majority-owned by a Chinese firm, and the German-owned SolarWorld. Advocates of the trade barrier says it will level the playing field with Chinese solar manufacturers that have received state support, and help bolster U.S. panel manufacturing. But the U.S. solar industry and even the conservative Wall Street Journal editorial board are largely opposed to moves that will drive up the cost of solar, which has become competitive with coal and natural gas in many parts of the country.

"The solar industry created one in every 51 jobs last year, and grew 17 times faster than the rest of the economy," said Solar Energy Industries Association President and Chief Executive Abigail Ross Hopper. "President Trump can put America First and play a significant role in the growth of our industry by rejecting the tariff requests of two foreign-owned companies."

New York Times
https://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/26/nyregion/eric-schneiderman-attorney-general-new-york.html?hp&target=comments
New York's Attorney General in Battle With Trump
By Danny Hakim and William K. Rashbaum, 12/26/17

Eric Schneiderman, New York's attorney general, reached a milestone of sorts recently.

By moving to sue the Federal Communications Commission over net neutrality this month, his office took its 100th legal or administrative action against the Trump administration and congressional Republicans. His lawyers have challenged Mr. Trump's first, second and third travel bans and sued over such diverse matters as a rollback in birth control coverage and a weakening of pollution standards. They have also unleashed a flurry of amicus briefs and formal letters, often with other Democratic attorneys general, assailing legislation they see as gutting consumer finance protections or civil rights.

"We try and protect New Yorkers from those who would do them harm," Mr. Schneiderman said during a recent interview in his Manhattan office. "The biggest threat to New Yorkers right now is the federal government, so we're responding to it."

In Mr. Schneiderman's seventh year as attorney general, the office has been transformed into a bulwark of resistance amid an unusually expansive level of confrontation with the federal government. Other Democratic state attorneys

general are undertaking similar efforts, often in concert, like Xavier Becerra in California, where extra money was set aside in the budget for the attorney general to battle the Trump administration.

How far Mr. Schneiderman is willing to go in taking on Mr. Trump could define his political career, particularly in a blue state where disapproval of the president is high. The potential of the attorney general's office for troublemaking and generating national headlines was redefined in the early 2000s by Eliot Spitzer. Mr. Schneiderman is a less combative man who was often the target of Mr. Trump's Twitter wrath amid a three-year civil investigation into Trump University. In the end, Mr. Schneiderman's office extracted a $25 million settlement in the case.

Nonetheless, Mr. Schneiderman is seen by some as a possible backstop should the president exercise his pardon power to help those who might become ensnared in the investigation of possible Russian involvement in the 2016 presidential election being led by Robert S. Mueller III, the special counsel. Federal pardons do not apply to violations of state law.

In the interview, Mr. Schneiderman would say little about his potential role as a criminal prosecutor in relation to the Trump administration, except that he hoped it would not come to that. Earlier this year, Mr. Schneiderman began a criminal inquiry focused on allegations of money laundering by Paul Manafort, Mr. Trump's former campaign chairman. But his office stood down, at least temporarily, out of deference to the special counsel's inquiry; the offices did not work together, his staff said.

"I have a lot of respect for the work the special counsel's doing," he said. "They've put together a terrific team."

He added: "Just watching it from the outside, like everybody else, it seems like they're doing a very thorough and serious job. I hope there's not going to be any effort to derail them or shut them down.

"If that happens, we'll do — as I think would be a genuine sentiment around the country — we'll do whatever we can do to see that justice is done. But I hope we don't have to face a problem like that."

Mr. Trump said recently he was not planning to fire Mr. Mueller, though many of his allies have stepped up their attacks on the special counsel's investigation.

Regarding Mr. Schneiderman's myriad legal filings, the White House referred questions to the Justice Department.

"The federal court system is not a substitute for the legislative process," said Devin M. O'Malley, a spokesman there. "The Department of Justice will continue to defend the president's constitutional and statutory authority to issue executive orders aimed at securing our borders, protecting U.S. workers, promoting free speech and religious liberty, among many other lawful actions."

Republican attorneys general targeted President Obama's policies while he was in office. Scott Pruitt, the head of Mr. Trump's Environmental Protection Agency, sued the E.P.A. 14 times as Oklahoma attorney general. But if Mr. Schneiderman were to take on a criminal prosecution, it would very likely be met with disdain by conservatives. One columnist at the National Review already called for Mr. Schneiderman to recuse himself from any criminal investigation of Mr. Trump because his comments and civil actions made it "impossible for the public to have confidence that he could be impartial."

Certainly, Mr. Schneiderman and Mr. Trump have little in common. Mr. Trump watches a lot of TV and craves his McDonald's. Mr. Schneiderman does yoga. "Other than sports, I really don't watch TV much anymore," Mr. Schneiderman said, and paused to think about the last time he had eaten a fast food burger. "That's a long time ago."

Mr. Schneiderman also says "it's better to have opponents and not enemies," a statement that would seem to run counter to Trump doctrine.

During the Trump University inquiry, Mr. Trump called Mr. Schneiderman "a lightweight," a "total loser," the "nation's worst AG," and "dopey." He has tweeted that Mr. Schneiderman wears "Revlon eyeliner" — his dark eyelashes have

been attributed to the side effect of a glaucoma medication — and said he needed to take a drug test because the attorney general "cannot be a cokehead," without presenting evidence that he was. In 2014, the front page of The New York Observer, which was owned by Mr. Trump's son-in-law, Jared Kushner, depicted him as Clockwork Eric, a takeoff on the Malcolm McDowell character from "A Clockwork Orange."

Mr. Schneiderman continued to be an irritant, reaching the settlement last year in the Trump University case, and also barring Mr. Trump's foundation from raising funds.

Top of Form

After Mr. Trump became president, Mr. Schneiderman was not expecting him to become "presidential."

"I probably had more realistic expectations," he said. "I saw the scorched-earth approach. He sued me for $100 million. He filed phony ethics complaints. He set up a website to attack me."

"Before Lyin' Ted and Little Marco, I had my nickname," Mr. Schneiderman said, though Mr. Trump never appeared to settle on a single epithet. "I didn't have any reason to believe he would change."

The day after Mr. Trump's victory, Mr. Schneiderman convened his staff in Manhattan and began the process of reorienting the mission of the office.

"The election was so traumatizing that my first step was to try and, essentially, pick everyone up off the canvas," he said. "I had people who were too depressed to go into work."

His staff soon began compiling something of a virtual war room, a Trump database to track federal actions and plan their responses. In some areas, Mr. Schneiderman said, they were "filling in" as the federal government rolled back enforcement of civil rights protections, wage rules and consumer protections.

"Then there's the second category where they're actually doing something to try and hurt New Yorkers," he said. "And that's not filling in, it's more like fighting back. A galvanizing experience for that was the first travel ban."

The pace of the confrontations with the administration has hardly abated. Recent actions have included joining 14 other states suing the E.P.A. "for failing to meet the Clean Air Act's statutory deadline" related to unhealthy levels of smog, and challenging the administration's move to bar a 17-year-old immigrant from getting an abortion.

"I did anticipate that the administration was going to be aggressively regressive," Mr. Schneiderman said, adding: "I did not anticipate the volume that he was going to start pumping out so quickly. These guys were generating lots of trouble very quickly."

That has led to a tighter relationship among Democratic attorneys general. "We don't have a stronger or smarter ally," Maura Healey, the Massachusetts attorney general, said of Mr. Schneiderman in a statement. He has also stayed in touch with Mr. Spitzer, who said in an interview that "Eric has done a good job" and "stepped into a chasm where today's ideological divisions create a lot of room for litigation."

Mr. Schneiderman's office continues to undertake prosaic work, like a recent settlement with an upstate landlord who returned $43,000 worth of security deposits. There are weightier matters as well; a special investigations unit has been reviewing cases in which unarmed New Yorkers were killed by the police, a process that led to the recent indictment of an upstate district attorney on a perjury charge.

But the Trump administration remains a central focus.

"I was a little worried after the first few weeks about burnout," Mr. Schneiderman said, but he added that lawyers in his office have resisted being moved off topics taking on the administration and felt that they were making a difference.

"On the one hand, it feels like this year has been a hundred years long," he said. "On the other, it feels like it shot by."

AP (via Wall Street Journal)
https://www.wsj.com/articles/AP87f0a52c6cc14c2aa530b94e3d4779cc
8 Eastern states suing EPA over upwind air pollution control
By AP, 12/26/17, 1:27 PM

ALBANY, N.Y. — The attorneys general in eight Eastern Seaboard states are suing the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency over air pollution that blows in from upwind states.

New York's Eric Schneiderman, the leading attorney general in the lawsuit, said it was filed Tuesday in a federal appeals court in the District of Columbia to force the Trump administration to take action to ensure upwind states control pollution.

Connecticut, Delaware, Maryland, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island and Vermont are also part of the lawsuit.

The suit stems from the EPA's denial of a petition some of those states filed in 2013 under the Clean Air Act to get the agency to add nine upwind states to a group that must work together to reduce smog pollution.

An EPA spokeswoman said no one from the agency was immediately available to comment.

The Hill
http://thehill.com/policy/energy-environment/366478-epas-pruitt-bring-back-true-environmentalism
EPA's Pruitt: Bring back 'true environmentalism'
By Timothy Cama, 12/27/17, 6:00 AM

When it comes to environmentalism, Scott Pruitt thinks environmentalists have it all wrong.

The head of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) under President Trump has been on a mission to redefine the mission of the agency and, in the process, redefine what it means to be a guardian of the environment.

Pruitt, the former Republican attorney general of Oklahoma, has said in recent public appearances and interviews that environmentalism ought to mean using natural resources like fossil fuels and agricultural products to their fullest potential, while being mindful of their impact.

It's meant as a sharp contrast, and perhaps a direct conservative challenge, to the established environmentalism of the last few decades, which has been largely dominated by the left. Green activists have long fought to reduce the use of fossil fuels, noting their impact on climate change and air quality.

"I've been asking the question lately, what is true environmentalism? What do you consider true environmentalism? And from my perspective, it's environmental stewardship, not prohibition," Pruitt said last month at an event hosted by the conservative Federalist Society.

"We have been blessed, as a country, with tremendous natural resources. ... I believe that we have an obligation to feed the world and power the world, with a sensitivity, as far as environmental stewardship, for future generations," he said.

"But for the past few years, we have been told it's prohibition, it's put up a fence, it's do not touch."

He had a similar take in a cover story published in the conservative National Review this month.

"If you are of the side that says we exist to serve creation, then you have no trouble putting up a fence and saying 'do not use,' " he said. "Even though people may starve, may freeze, though developing countries may never develop their economies."

Mainstream environmentalists scoff at Pruitt's argument.

Sen. Brian Schatz (D-Hawaii), a leading climate change activist in the Senate, laughed audibly at the idea, following it up with, "that laugh was on the record."

"You don't get to make it so because you say it is," he said. "Up is down, left is right, no. Words have meanings."

Michael Brune, executive director of the Sierra Club, had trouble taking the idea seriously.

"I find myself wondering whether Scott Pruitt actually believes this stuff, or if he's a careful student of George Orwell. If he repeats something enough, again and again and again, at least some portion of the public will begin to believe it," said Brune, whose group is the largest environmental organization in the country when counted by membership.

Asked if Pruitt's attempted redefinition angered him, Brune said it didn't.

"His statements cause me to shake my head and almost chuckle," Brune said. "What he says doesn't piss me off. What he says has me worried about our country's future."

Pruitt's supporters say he raises good points. Republicans have long felt that the left has unfairly taken hold of environmentalism and that conservatives who care about clean air and clean water need to reclaim the movement and be recognized for their contributions.

"I think he's right, and I think his perspective is long overdue," said Ed Russo, an ally of President Trump and an environmental consultant who has worked with the Trump Organization for more than a decade, frequently on environmental matters related to its golf courses.

Russo cited coal policies, along with efforts to encourage cleaner production and use of coal, as prime examples of conservative environmental policies that have not gotten a fair hearing.

"For the past 10 years, there were certain aspects of energy that you couldn't talk about in Washington, coal being one of them," he said.

Russo, who penned a book last year declaring Trump an "environmental hero," opined that a focus on climate change in recent years has been a major source of the divide, detracting attention away from cleaning the nation's air, water and soil.

"I think that global warming has been a very hurtful distraction for the environmental community," he said.

"The focus must be redirected from these nuanced initiatives to the cleaning up of the disastrous environmental impacts that we've created over the last 50 years."

Behind Pruitt's rhetoric is his policy agenda. An outspoken skeptic of the consensus scientific view of climate change, Pruitt has taken dozens of actions to roll back Obama administration policies on climate, air pollution, water pollution, chemical safety and more.

In the process, he's become a lightning rod for the left, with Democrats pointing to the EPA's agenda as proof of Trump's disdain for crucial government protections.

Meanwhile, Trump's supporters have lauded Pruitt, both for his actions and for what he has done to fight liberals — including his mission to take "environmentalism" from them.

"He's right on target, and he's being realistic," said Sen. Jim Inhofe (R-Okla.), a close home-state ally of Pruitt's.

"There's no way we can run this machine called America without fossil fuels."

The idea also aligns with Pruitt's stated environmental goals. Like most conservatives, Pruitt says he wants to prioritize cleaning up air quality and contaminated lands, which he sees as affecting people more acutely, directly and immediately than climate change.

Aseem Prakash, director of Washington University's Center for Environmental Politics, said that using resources responsibly has a place in environmental stewardship. For example, some experts argue that current policies make it difficult to remove brush from forests, which fuels forest fires.

"So in some ways, a puritanical approach to the environment may actually lead to more destruction of the environment, under certain circumstances," Prakash said, with the caveat that that is an "extremely sympathetic" way to read Pruitt.

But he dismissed Pruitt's attempts to redefine environmentalism as little more than political maneuvering.

"This is not an intellectual argument. I don't think he is trying to redefine environmentalism at an intellectual level," he said.

"This is pandering to a political constituency, and using environmentalism and fossil fuels to fuel polarization."

Prakash contrasted Pruitt's arguments with those of the free-market environmentalism community. That school of thought recognizes the same environmental problems that left-leaning greens do, but pushes small-government policies to solve them, as opposed to regulations and policies that grow government.

But Pruitt is no free-market environmentalist, Prakash argued.

"I would welcome an intellectual engagement. But what I think Scott Pruitt is doing is not an intellectual engagement, because there are no ideas there. There are a bunch of slogans that have not been carefully thought through."

Washington Post
https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/health-science/under-scott-pruitt-a-year-of-tumult-and-transformation-at-epa/2017/12/26/f93d1262-e017-11e7-8679-a9728984779c_story.html
How Scott Pruitt turned the EPA into one of Trump's most powerful tools
By Brady Dennis & Juliet Eilperin, 12/26/17 @ 10:06 AM

Since 2010, the Environmental Protection Agency has been embroiled in an enforcement battle with a Michigan-based company accused of modifying the state's largest coal-fired power plant without getting federal permits for a projected rise in pollution.

On Dec. 7, as the Supreme Court was considering whether to hear the case, EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt issued a memo that single-handedly reversed the agency's position. No longer would the EPA be "second-guessing" DTE Energy's emission projections. Rather, it would accept the firm's "intent" to manage its pollution without requiring an enforceable agreement — part of President Trump's broader push to reduce the "burden" on companies, he wrote.

The little-noticed episode offers a glimpse into how Pruitt has spent his first year running the EPA. In legal maneuvers and executive actions, in public speeches and closed-door meetings with industry groups, he has moved to shrink the agency's reach, alter its focus and pause or reverse numerous environmental rules. The effect has been to steer the EPA in the direction sought by those being regulated.

Along the way, Pruitt has begun to dismantle former president Barack Obama's environmental legacy, halting the agency's efforts to combat climate change and shift the nation away from its reliance on fossil fuels.

Such aggressiveness on issues from coal waste to vehicle emissions has made Pruitt one of President Trump's most high-profile and consequential Cabinet members. It also has made him one of the most controversial.

Critics describe his short tenure as an assault on the agency's mission, its science and its employees.

"We've spent 40 years putting together an apparatus to protect public health and the environment from a lot of different pollutants," said William Ruckleshaus, the EPA's first administrator, who led the agency under both Richard Nixon and Ronald Reagan. "He's pulling that whole apparatus down."

Yet, allies praise Pruitt for returning more power to individual states while scaling back what they see as the previous administration's regulatory excesses.

"It is a stark change, the way they solicit input from the industry that they're seeking to regulate," said Karen Harbert, president of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce's Global Energy Institute, who welcomes the shift.

In an interview, Pruitt said a priority during his first 10 months in office has been listening to "stakeholders that actually live under the regulations that we adopt . . . I don't understand how that's not what I should be doing."

Already, some people are speculating about what his future holds.

As Oklahoma attorney general, Pruitt was widely viewed as a potential gubernatorial candidate there. Since he joined the Trump administration, rumors have swirled about whether he might pursue a Senate seat. He regularly heads to the White House mess for lunch, which provides more opportunities to run into key presidential aides. Privately, he has mused about whether he could occupy other Cabinet spots, according to individuals who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss confidential conversations.

The man who spent years railing against the long reach of the federal government now seems determined to make his mark in Washington.

Pruitt, 49, stands on the opposite end of the political spectrum from his immediate predecessor, Gina McCarthy, but the two share something in common: a willingness to use the agency's broad executive authority to act unilaterally.

"Vested in the administrator is this incredible power and this incredible regulatory reach," said Ken Cook, president of the advocacy organization Environmental Working Group (EWG). "When there's someone on the inside willing to unlock the door and let these special interests in, they can do tremendous damage to the environmental rule of law."

From the moment he arrived at the agency in February, Pruitt began using his levers of power to halt existing regulations and shift the bureaucracy.

"The administrator has been effective and very decisive on a number of issues [where] he can do things with the stroke of a pen," said Jeffrey Holmstead, a former top EPA official under George W. Bush and now a partner at the law and lobbying firm Bracewell. "He came in with a list of targets he needed to deal with, and he's been very decisive on saying, 'Here's what we need to do.' "

Within days of taking office, Pruitt canceled EPA's request that nearly 20,000 oil and gas companies gauge their emissions of methane, a potent greenhouse gas. The following month, he withdrew a proposed ban on a commonly used pesticide, chlorpyrifos, that the EPA's own scientists had argued posed risks to human health.

Last month, the EPA issued a guidance document outlining how it would implement a bipartisan 2016 law that for the first time requires the agency to rule on a new chemical's potential risks before allowing it on the market. Instead of including "reasonably foreseeable uses," the document states, the agency will now consider only the "intended" conditions of use submitted by the manufacturer — a significant and contentious change.

Three of the bill's Democratic authors say the interpretation defies the law's intent. But it is precisely the approach pushed by the American Chemistry Council.

Despite his scant experience running environmental programs, Pruitt sued the Obama EPA 14 times as Oklahoma attorney general and challenged the agency's authority to regulate toxic mercury pollution, smog, carbon emissions from power plants and the quality of wetlands and other waters.

"All that suing he did for years steeped him in the knowledge of the agency and how it works," Ruckleshaus noted.

That doesn't mean Pruitt has prevailed on all fronts this year. In July, a federal appeals court vacated EPA's attempt to delay a rule limiting methane and other pollutants from oil and gas operations. The next month, after Democratic attorneys general and public health groups went to court, the agency reversed its decision to delay implementating an Obama-era rule requiring more stringent air quality standards.

David Rivkin, a partner at Baker Hostetler and one of the administrator's informal advisers, said Pruitt remains acutely aware of the gauntlet he faces. "I cannot think of any administrator who paid so much attention to creating rules that are legally defensible," Rivkin said.

Pruitt says he has set about "revitalizing" the agency and focusing on areas, such as the Superfund cleanup program, that were "dormant" in past administrations. He seems confident that he will succeed in reshaping the EPA as he and Trump envision, despite environmental advocates vowing to battle him at every turn.

"I'm pretty sanguine about our ability to defend our actions here at the agency, so long as we do things timely and within the text of the statute," he said. "The problem the agency had historically is when [officials] have not done things in the time frame they were supposed to do something. That's invited lawsuits that then allow others to set the priorities."

From his wood-paneled office complex on the third floor of EPA's headquarters, Pruitt operates in a cocoon of sorts.

He is accompanied 24/7 by a security detail — a setup that has tripled past staffing requirements. He has installed biometric locks on his office doors, as well as a $25,000 soundproof booth from which he can make secure calls to the White House. And he has shied away from using email at the EPA, which would be subject to open records laws, preferring instead to communicate by phone or in face-to-face meetings.

While he has met with scores of industry executives, trade groups, farmers and ranchers, spoken to conservative political organizations and shuttled back and forth to the White House, Pruitt's calendars show limited contact with the EPA's own career staff. He has visited 30 states, by his count, but has yet to visit any of EPA's 10 regional offices.

The EPA routinely refuses to release details about where Pruitt will be any given day, citing security concerns. So as he travels the country and sometimes the world, his appearances often come as a surprise to the media and the public.

Despite Pruitt's claims that his door is open, advocacy groups such as the Sierra Club and EWG haven't bothered to request meetings. But when Earthjustice asked to attend a May session with state officials about how EPA planned to give them more authority over storing toxic coal ash, the agency refused. It also denied access to a 247-page guidance document it was drafting.

Other organizations have come up against similar walls. In response to a Freedom of Information Act request from a public watchdog group, government lawyers said Pruitt's Superfund Task Force took no minutes of its meetings. On one of the administrator's top priorities, the task force apparently produced just one document — a list of final recommendations.

The paradigm shift at EPA has been dominated so far by a handful of political aides and trusted advisers, led by the agency's chief of staff Ryan Jackson, who didn't require confirmation. The Senate only recently confirmed several of the agency's top deputies.

"It doesn't take a big staff to delay things and provide almost no reasoning," said Georgetown University law professor Lisa Heinzerling, who served as EPA's associate administrator for the Office of Policy between July 2009 and December 2010. But she cautioned that Pruitt eventually will have to provide more detailed legal justifications for his own regulatory proposals. "That's where it's going to get trickier."

Legal fights aside, Pruitt is making a more fundamental push to alter the agency's composition and mind-set. Too often in recent years, he said, the agency has come at issues in terms of "prohibition" — "It was to put up fences. It was to keep fossil fuels in the ground, as an example." By contrast, he sees his role as allowing the country to responsibly tap its natural resources.

"He understands the culture of the agency as part of the problem," said former Virginia attorney general Ken Cuccinelli, who joined Pruitt in suing the Obama administration. Some EPA staff "believe they have been anointed by God" to pursue a specific agenda, he said.

To that end, Pruitt has moved aggressively to shrink the agency. More than 700 people have left, several hundred through buyouts this summer. With them have gone decades of scientific expertise. T he EPA now has about 14,400 staff — fewer than at any time since the final year of the Reagan administration. The exodus has dampened morale, numerous current and former career staffers say.

At the same time, Pruitt has overhauled the EPA's scientific advisory boards, getting rid of numerous academic researchers in favor of experts from regulated industries and conservative states.

EPA's leader argues that he is trying to make it more efficient, to create "almost a franchise model" where regional offices around the country would act with more uniformity. He recruited a former top Arizona environmental official to create metrics for the agency's performance.

What Pruitt describes as efficiency, his critics see as undermining the EPA's ability to fulfill its mission. But friends and foes alike agree that he has been straightforward about his intentions.

Environmental group Trout Unlimited's president, Chris Wood, met with the administrator early on. The two spoke cordially about cleaning up abandoned mines, but the reception "was a lot chillier" when Wood suggested maintaining Obama-era policies to protect seasonal streams and block a proposed gold mine near Alaska's Bristol Bay.

"It was an incredibly honest meeting," Wood recalled. "He didn't pretend he was going to be Theodore Roosevelt."

Both at home and abroad, Pruitt is proving to be anything but a typical EPA head.

While he successfully lobbied Trump to exit the 2015 Paris climate accord, leaving the United States as the only nation in the world to reject it, Pruitt has shown an interest in raising his profile beyond U.S. borders.

In June, he took seven political aides to Rome before attending a summit of G-7 environment ministers in Bologna, Italy. Their first stop featured not just a meet-and-greet with business executives but two days of papal visits, including a private tour of the Vatican and St. Peter's Basilica.

This month, he and an entourage of aides traveled to Morocco at a price tag of roughly $40,000. Pruitt met with the country's foreign minister, talked about solid waste and toured a solar energy installation. But he also spent time touting the advantages of U.S. natural gas exports.

It was an extraordinary occurrence: the leader of the EPA, in a foreign land, serving as one of the most outspoken salesmen for the nation's fossil fuel industry.

MLive
http://www.mlive.com/news/grand-rapids/index.ssf/2017/12/epa_wolverine_pfas.html
EPA entering Wolverine PFAS investigation
By Garret Ellison, 12/23/17

ROCKFORD, MI -- The Environmental Protection Agency is making a small but significant entrance into the toxic fluorochemical pollution investigation in Kent County, Mich.

The EPA will begin sampling groundwater and drinking water wells polluted with per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS or PFCs) from Wolverine World Wide tannery waste starting next week.

The agency confirmed its involvement on Friday, Dec. 22.

Aside from some consultation visits by advisors, sample collection would be the first federal boots on the ground in the investigation.

An EPA spokesperson characterized the agency's role as "supporting" the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality's response to the multi-plume, multi-township PFAS investigation sparked by discovery of contaminated wells in Belmont in April.

"While MDEQ is taking the lead on drinking water issues, EPA is assisting the state in collecting water samples to verify data provided by Wolverine," the agency said.

"EPA personnel have coordinated with MDEQ and will sample groundwater and well water at impacted residences during the week of December 25. EPA will notify residents of their individual sampling results as soon as they are available."

People with knowledge of the investigation say the EPA has been a regular presence on conference calls this month as pressure mounts on the state to devote more resources and seek federal assistance for the bulging Wolverine response and the 28 sites so far with PFAS contamination in 14 communities around Michigan.

This week, the governor signed a supplemental appropriations bill for $23.2 million to aid the PFAS response statewide.

The DEQ says the EPA has been advising the Wolverine investigation for a while, but the federal presence has loomed larger since the Kent County Health Department asked Gov. Rick Snyder to get the EPA more involved, suggesting it might if the state wouldn't.

Michigan's Congressional delegation also asked the EPA to take a larger hand in the PFAS response and the county's letter caught the attention of some state lawmakers in Lansing, who questioned the state's apparent reluctance to seek more EPA involvement.

It's unknown whether the EPA plans to remain involved in the investigation beyond the scope it has disclosed.

The DEQ referred questions to the EPA on Friday.

Wolverine said the EPA expects to sample a handful of monitoring wells at the House Street landfill and former tannery site in Rockford, and about 15 residential wells.

"These confirmation samples are collected by EPA and sent to an independent laboratory to confirm that the results are the same as those received from laboratories used by Wolverine and the MDEQ," the company announced on its blog.

Test results confirm both the House Street landfill and the tannery are major sources of PFAS contamination.

Total combined PFOS and PFOA concentrations at the 1855 House Street NE dump are more than 668 times the EPA's health advisory level of 70-ppt -- a non-enforceable threshold for what's considered safe in drinking water, for which the groundwater under hundreds of residences in the dump's vicinity is used.

Total combined PFOS and PFOA concentrations under the tannery grounds in Rockford are 7,000 times the EPA level. Although nearby properties are connected to Rockford municipal water, which has tested clean, the tannery is adjacent to the Rogue River and upstream of the city's former surface water treatment plant river intake.

Rockford stopped drinking from the river in 2000.

The Kent County Health Department, which has argued the Wolverine investigation is stretching its resources, said it "welcomes the additional resources that the EPA brings."

We are confident that the agency's expertise and efforts can only hasten the ultimate goal of solving the issues associated with groundwater contamination as it now exists," said department spokesperson Steve Kelso.

Wood TV
http://woodtv.com/2017/12/23/epa-enters-the-toxic-tap-water-investigation/
EPA enters the toxic tap water investigation
By Barton Deiters, 12/23/17, updated at 10:56 PM

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. (WOOD) — The Wolverine Worldwide toxic tap water crisis is now being investigated by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, which is expected to begin sampling water in northern Kent County next week.

Having the EPA take an active role in the PFAS crisis is something many have wanted to see for a long time.

On Saturday, the federal agency confirmed they are here to help.

Cody Angell is an IT professional who helps run the Facebook Page "Demand Action from Plainfield Township," which with nearly 4,500 members has become a clearing house for information about the ever-growing contamination area that resulted from decades of Wolverine Worldwide's disposal of contaminated sludge.

Angell said he was delighted to hear that the EPA has confirmed that it will begin taking samples to verify data that Wolverine World Wide has provided to the public.

"So this is a blessing, this is obviously the Federal Government coming in, hopefully they're more organized than what the DEQ is, hopefully they have more funds and hopefully we get an idea of how big this really is," said Angell, a Plainfield Township resident.

Many residents, the Kent County Health Department and Michigan's congressional delegation have been wanting the EPA to become more involved.

The EPA has been advising the State of Michigan, but this is a much more hands-on involvement by the federal government.

Earlier this month, Senators Debbie Stabenow and Gary Peters, along with GOP members of the House signed a letter calling for the EPA to step in.

Slated to begin next week, the EPA will take samples from several existing monitoring wells and at least 15 residential wells in the area.

The samples will be tested by independent laboratories selected by the EPA to see if the levels they find match those results from Wolverine and the Michigan DEQ.

"I'm hoping with the federal oversight, that things tend to get a lot more organized and more information is put out for the residents to understand," Angell said.

Angell said he hopes the EPA is here for the long haul and that the scope of the investigation goes on to include more than just PFAS.

But so far, the EPA has not indicated that it will be taking a long-term hand in this investigation.

"At the end of the day, all we want is clean water," Angell said.

At last count, there are 35 lawsuits filed in Kent County Circuit Court against Wolverine World Wide.

On its website, the company says it welcomes the EPA involvement and will cooperate fully.

Wood TV
http://woodtv.com/2017/12/26/pfas-crisis-spreads-in-algoma-township/
PFAS crisis spreads in Algoma Township
Ken Kolker Published: December 26, 2017, 6:32 pm

ALGOMA TOWNSHIP — Mary Gelderbloom wasn't surprised when tests found high levels of PFAS, a likely carcinogen, in the well she's used for 31 years.

Her level: 338.2 parts per trillion, five times the EPA advisory level for drinking water.

She lives in Algoma Township, west of U.S. 131, at 11 Mile Road and Jewell Avenue NE.

She wasn't surprised, she said, because relatives who live nearby also had high readings, one of those 10 times the EPA's limit.

But while Algoma Township already plans to provide city water to homes on the east side of U.S. 131, north of the 10 Mile Road Meijer store, there are no such plans for Gelderbloom's side of the highway.

A new Michigan Department of Environmental Quality report shows 44 wells in Algoma Township — north of 10 Mile Road — with PFAS levels over the EPA limit.

>>Inside woodtv.com: Complete coverage of the toxic tap water investigation

It's an area where Wolverine reportedly dumped PFAS-laden sludge from its Rockford tannery on farm fields decades ago for fertilizer.

In Belmont, near Wolverine's old House Street dump where the PFAS crisis started, 30 homes are over the EPA level.

In Algoma Township, on the west side of US-131, some residents say the findings show a need for city water. Others want no part of it.

"I've been very, very healthy, very, very healthy, praise God," Gelderbloom said. "Yep, very healthy."

The 79-year-old says Wolverine already has installed a whole-house filter. On Wednesday, she said, the company and the EPA are supposed to return to make sure her filtered water is safe.

"They haven't been wasting any time at all," she said.

Algoma Township Supervisor Kevin Green said high PFAS levels in the more-populated area along Wolven Avenue, east of US-131, have accelerated plans to extend municipal water there. He said that could happen sometime in 2019.

But while he believes muncipal water is also the "best solution" for those on the other side of the highway, that could take much longer.

But Gelderbloom wants no part of that on her side of the highway.

"I still have a well," she said. "I love my well. I have underground sprinkling system and guess what? I don't have to pay for any water."

Her neighbor across the street is still waiting for his test results, but is expecting the worst.

"We're pretty confident; we're surrounded by people who've had some pretty high numbers," said Larry Earegood.

Earegood said city water is the only answer — for peace of mind and for property values.

"I don't see how else you're going to restore property values," he said. "I don't see how you're going to guarantee growth. Who's going to buy when there's a high risk if I drop a well, I'm tapping into something I don't want to be drinking?"

He was among Algoma Township residents who never thought it would reach them.

"Wolverine is kind of like in the position of the person that just rear-ended me," Earegood said. "Obviously, they didn't want to do it, wouldn't have done it for anything in the world, but they did it. You've got to be responsible for it."

Fox News
http://www.foxnews.com/politics/2017/12/26/junk-science-studies-behind-obama-regulations-under-fire.html
'Junk science'? Studies behind Obama regulations under fire
By Fred Lucas, 12/27/17, 11:00 AM

Scientific studies used by the Obama administration to help justify tough environmental regulations are coming under intensifying scrutiny, with critics questioning their merit as the Trump EPA reverses or delays some of those rules.

In one case, agencies determined the research used to prop up a ban on a pesticide was questionable. On another front, the Environmental Protection Agency never complied with a congressional subpoena for the data used to justify most Obama administration air quality rules.

"EPA regulations are based on secret data developed in the 1990s," Steve Milloy, who served on President Trump's EPA transition team, told Fox News. "For the EPA, coming up with cherry-picked data is standard operating procedure."

Milloy, author of "Scare Pollution: Why and How to Fix the EPA," was previously a lawyer for the Securities and Exchange Commission and is among critics who accuse federal agencies of carefully selecting scientific research to fit a political agenda.

In October, EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt issued a directive to ensure that individuals serving on EPA advisory committees don't get EPA grants and are free from potential conflicts of interest.

"Whatever science comes out of EPA, shouldn't be political science," Pruitt said in a statement. "From this day forward, EPA advisory committee members will be financially independent from the agency."

Environmental groups blasted the decision.

"For Pruitt, anything that helps corporate polluters make money is good and science and facts are just roadblocks he wants to tear down," said Michael Brune, executive director of the Sierra Club.

Pruitt has become one of the most controversial members of the Trump administration in its first year, cast by his detractors as battling the kinds of regulations his agency is supposed to be upholding. But his office suggests many of those rules were flawed from the start.

Here's a look at some of the most controversial studies behind those regulations:

Pesticide Ban

Pruitt recently reversed the 2015 ban on the insecticide chlorpyrifos for agricultural use, amid questions over the process.

The Obama administration's EPA had originally justified the ban based on a study by the Columbia Center for Children's Environmental Health, which said the insecticide was linked to childhood developmental delays. While it was already banned for home use since 2000, the decision put the U.S. at odds with over 100 countries that allow the chemical for agricultural purposes.

Government agencies later questioned the findings.

The EPA Scientific Advisory Panel's meeting report said: "[T]he majority of the Panel considers the Agency's use of the results from a single longitudinal study to make a decision with immense ramifications based on the use of cord blood measures of chlorpyrifos as a PoD for risk assessment as premature and possibly inappropriate."

The USDA stated it had "grave concerns about the EPA process...and severe doubts about the validity of the scientific conclusions underpinning EPA's latest chlorpyrifos risk assessment."

The center also gets EPA funding, noted Angela Logomasini, senior fellow at the Competitive Enterprise Institute, a free-market think tank.

"Agencies shouldn't be able to cherry-pick. It's a problem with administrative procedures across the board," Logomasini told Fox News. "When money goes to politically active research groups, it's government funding of the science."

Harvard Study

The Obama administration's EPA used the 1993 Harvard Six Cities Study to justify air quality regulations on particulate matter, or particles of pollution in the air. The regulations—linked to devastating the coal industry—also affect automobiles, power plants and factories.

In 2013 the House Science, Space and Technology Committee subpoenaed the EPA for data from the study, which links particulate air pollution to infant mortality.

But in 2014, then-EPA Administrator Gina McCarthy told the committee the agency couldn't produce either the Harvard study or information from a 1994 American Cancer Society study—claiming the EPA didn't own the information.

Congress tried to get information from then-EPA Administrator Gina McCarthy on the science behind the agency's air regulations. (AP)

"We did a very large analysis for California, which has arguably the most detailed database in the U.S. of mortality, and couldn't find any acute deaths due to PM2.5, even during the raging wildfires of 2007, when levels went through the roof," Hank Campbell, president of the American Council on Science and Health, told Fox News.

For its part, Harvard argues regulations that stemmed from the report's recommendations saved lives and were cost-effective.

Global Warming Hiatus?

The House science committee also is investigating the process behind a 2015 report from a team of scientists with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, led by Thomas Karl, director of the agency's National Climate Data Center.

Committee Chairman Lamar Smith, R-Texas., said the timing of the global warming report was curious because it lined up with the Obama administration's Clean Power Plan and the Paris Climate Conference (both of which the Trump administration now plans to abandon).

Karl denied the paper was released for political reasons, but critics linked it to a period between 1998 and 2013 known as the climate change "hiatus" -- when the rate of global temperature growth slowed.

John Bates, former principal scientist at the National Climatic Data Center in Asheville, N.C., said the study was issued with the purpose of discrediting any hiatus. Another scientist, Judith Curry, formerly of Georgia Tech, asserted that NOAA, a division of the Commerce Department, excluded certain data from their study in order to reach their preferred conclusion.

Commerce Department spokesman James Rockas said the matter is under review. In response to lawmakers' concerns, "and in the interest of assuring the highest scientific standards, Commerce engaged outside experts to evaluate Department processes with regard to the production of scientific studies," Rockas told Fox News.

Formaldehyde Findings

Under Pruitt, the EPA also moved the compliance date back for a 2010 rule setting emission standards for formaldehyde in composite wood products. Formaldehyde is a potential carcinogen.

The regulation was driven by the EPA's office of Integrated Risk Information System, or IRIS, which produces chemical risk assessments to identify potential health hazards that other agency programs use to set standards.

"IRIS studies raised a whole host of questions with the formaldehyde regulation," CEI's Logomasini said.

The National Research Council—part of the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine—urged the EPA to reform IRIS and, in 2011, found the IRIS conclusions on formaldehyde had "[p]roblems with clarity and transparency of the methods" that "appear to be a repeating theme over the years."

Pre-Diabetes 'Epidemic'

Last year, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention launched a website, "DoIHavePreDiabetes.org."

The CDC designated 5.7 percent for the average blood sugar level, or A1C, as being a "pre-diabetic" condition. This would mean 85 million Americans are pre-diabetic, said Campbell, of the American Council on Science and Health.

"Basically, CDC created an arbitrary standard that the rest of the world refuses to recognize as valid," Campbell said. "The government hoped to scare people into changing their diets."

Campbell pointed to National Institutes of Health numbers that only about 5 percent to 10 percent of people with that blood sugar level will develop diabetes. The World Health Organization and the International Diabetes Federation effectively stopped talking about prediabetes in 2014.

Health leaders around the world are working to address both prediabetes and diabetes, said CDC spokeswoman Alaina Robertson.

"The prediabetes category is very diverse and includes varying levels of elevated blood glucose," Robertson told Fox News in an email. "This includes those with fewer risk factors and lower blood glucose (those closest to 5 percent); and those with significant risk factors and more elevated glucose levels (those closer to, and in some cases exceeding, 10 percent)."

Vaping Danger

Because the nicotine in e-cigarettes is derived from tobacco, the Food and Drug Administration can regulate it and the CDC issues warnings. Campbell and others stress research overwhelmingly shows that vaping helps smoking cessation and poses nowhere near the same risk as smoking.

The CDC's own 2015 National Health Interview Survey found a majority of former smokers, 63 percent in 2014 and 66 percent in 2015, vaped every day. But Campbell said the agency tends to de-emphasize cessation and focus on e-cigarette addiction.

"The CDC's use of surveys to undermine the harm reduction and smoking cessation viability of e-cigarettes is junk science," Campbell said.

However, there is good reason for caution, CDC spokesman Joel London told Fox News.

"The bottom line is that e-cigarettes have the potential to benefit adult smokers who are not pregnant if used as a complete substitute for regular cigarettes and other smoked tobacco products," London said. "At present, the scientific evidence is insufficient to recommend e-cigarettes for smoking cessation, and e-cigarettes are not currently approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration as a quit smoking aid."

Congressional Action

Some members of Congress back legislation to require agencies to rely on the "best available science" and consider a body of research, rather than a single study backing up a pre-existing decision. The bill also requires agencies to make the data available to Congress and the public.

The Better Evaluation of Science and Technology Act, or "BEST Act," is sponsored in the House by Republican Reps. Ralph Norman of South Carolina and Paul Gosar of Arizona and in the Senate by Sen. James Lankford, R-Okla.

A coalition of 10 conservative organizations signed a letter to Congress backing the bill.

"The American people should be confident that when agencies regulate, they rely on up-to-date, accurate, and unbiased information," Lankford told Fox News.

However, such oversight could "cripple the ability of agencies ... to rely on scientific evidence to issue public health and safety safeguards," Yogin Kothari, Washington representative for the Center for Science and Democracy, said in a statement earlier this year.

"Likewise, the tobacco industry would have been able to cast doubt on the link between cigarettes and lung cancer," Kothari wrote. "The list goes on. Today, you can imagine the fossil fuel industry using the vague language to attack climate science as a justification for slowing down solutions that prevent global warming."

CNN

http://www.cnn.com/2017/12/26/opinions/earth-from-space-climate-change-opinion-mark-kelly/index.html

OPINION: Mark Kelly: This year has been an unequivocal disaster for the future of the planet

12/26/17, 4:49 PM

(CNN) In 2001, I flew my first flight into space aboard Space Shuttle Endeavour. Roughly a decade later, I commanded that same space shuttle on its final flight. That trip was my fourth journey -- and at least for now, my final one -- from this planet into space.

To see our planet as this majestic blue ball floating in the blackness of space is breathtaking. It is truly the most amazing thing I've ever seen. When you see it for the first time it appears perfect. Bright and mostly blue, it's a literal island in our solar system. And make no mistake -- right now, we have no place else to go.

Too often, we forget that this remarkable and fragile place is our only home, a point that was underscored earlier this month at the largest gathering of Earth scientists in New Orleans.

At the conference, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) made a sobering announcement. It came as part of a study of climate change on 2016's weather. The scientists behind the study concluded that without climate change, three of the most severe weather events that took place that year would not have happened. Which events?

1. Heat waves that scorched parts of Asia, including India and Thailand, killing more than 500 people. 2. A patch of unusually warm water in the Pacific Ocean that's had harmful effects on marine life along the coast of North America. 3. And rising air temperatures that made 2016 the hottest in recorded history.
Read More

The impact of climate change -- the scars that it's leaving on our planet -- is visible from above, too.

There is visible pollution over large portions of the Earth. You often see this over the Asian sub-continent. The burning of wood and plastic and other materials to heat the homes of hundreds of millions of Indians creates a thick smoke over thousands of square miles.

In China, the problem is more industrialized and more severe. Coal power plants and millions of cars have polluted the skies over eastern China to the extent that I can honestly say I don't believe I have seen the terra firma of eastern China during my four missions into space. It is hidden by a constant blanket of tiny airborne particles of despair.

Perhaps the thing that worries me the most is the massive deforestation underway in areas like Asia and Latin America. Countless trees and millions of square miles of jungle and forest have been removed to accommodate our desires for more -- more wood, more farmland, more pasture, more meat.

When I first looked down upon the Amazon rainforest in 2001, I saw vast areas of jungle and a wide and winding copper colored river that went on and on and on. A river that was impossible to miss and like no other on the planet. By 2011, however, the part that was most noticeable wasn't the river or the jungle but the large swaths of empty land.

From space, it looks empty because we are far away. We don't see the crops or the cattle but we do see the loss. We see the loss of an incredibly diverse ecosystem that once held endless possibilities for new medicines and other discoveries.

We see the loss of a home for so many species that will now have to learn to adapt and survive somewhere else -- or not. And we see the loss of a large amount of carbon, sequestered in a living and breathing ecosystem which created massive amounts of oxygen for all of us.

That carbon, once the giver of life to millions of species all over our planet, now has a new role: greenhouse gas. It will sit in our atmosphere as CO and CO2 for millennia, but in this case as an invisible blanket, warming our planet, changing our climate and creating a cataclysmic mess for future generations.

As an astronaut, I'm often asked about the climate, our environment, and how we are destroying the Earth. My response often surprises people. "Don't worry about the planet, the Earth will be just fine," I tell them. "What you need to worry about is us -- all of us."

This year has been an unequivocal disaster for the future of the planet. President Donald Trump has managed to take a wrecking ball to years' worth of hard work and painstaking negotiations. If not undone, our retreat from the Paris Climate Accords and the EPA's Clean Power Plan alone mean our planet's temperature will rise at a greater rate and our citizen's health will degrade. Other changes in environmental regulations on drilling and auto and appliance efficiency will only make matters worse.

The United States was handed the mantle of leadership on this and so many other issues decades ago for a reason. It is because we are good at it.
Our President has an obligation to look closely at the raw data on climate change. If he does, I think he will reach the same conclusion that I and so many others have reached.

As you pass over the United States in space at night you can see, with your own naked eye, the bright lights that prove we lead the world in energy consumption.
It is very obvious. What's not obvious is whether our country will adequately respond to this reality. As the largest consumer of energy we must lead the way in solving this problem. If we don't do this, who will?